

Message Text

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SUBJ: PANAMA CANAL NEGOTIATIONS: LETTER IN NY TIMES

FOLLOWING IS THE TEXT OF A LETTER TO THE EDITOR OF THE NY
TIMES FROM PANAMANIAN DELEGATION OFFICER ROQUE JAVIER
LAURENZA:

PANAMA: A MORAL TEST FOR THE US

THE CONSERVATIVE ANTI-PANAMA LOBBY IS BASING ITS ACTIVITIES
ON THE ALLEGATION THAT THE US "OWNS" THE CANAL ZONE AS A
DIRECT CONSEQUENCE OF THE 1903 TREATY. THIS LOBBY IS TAKING
FOR GRANTED THAT THIS TREATY WAS DISCUSSED BEFOREHAND,
AGREED UPON AND WRITTEN BY BOTH PARTIES TO IT.

IN FACT, THAT TREATY WAS THE PRODUCT OF A CONSPIRACY
BETWEEN PRESIDENT THEODORE ROOSEVELT AND SECRETARY OF STATE
JOHN HAY, WITH THE COMPLICITY OF A FRENCHMAN, PHILIPPE
BUNAUVARILLA, WHO WAS ACTING AS AGENT FOR PANAMA BUT WAS
A MAJOR SHAREHOLDER OF THE FRENCH COMPANY THAT WAS SELLING
ITS RIGHTS FOR THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE CANAL. THE TREATY
WAS NEVER NEGOTIATED, WAS PREPARED IN BARELY THREE DAYS
AND READ FOR THE FIRST TIME BY THE PANAMANIAN THREE HOURS
AFTER THE SIGNING.

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THE PANAMA CANAL QUESTION IS A MORAL TEST FOR THE US
ESPECIALLY AT THIS MOMENT OF HISTORY. WHEN THE AMERICAN
PEOPLE ARE IN THE MIDST OF A SELF-CATHARSIS. TODAY THE
US NEEDS, FOR REASONS RELATED TO ITS MORAL PRESTIGE, TO
OFFER AN EXAMPLE TO THE OTHER GREAT POWERS OF THE WORLD:
A MIGHTY PEOPLE BOWING TO JUSTICE, UNDOING THE WRONG DONE
TO A SMALL NATION.

THIS IS WHY THE LATEST WASHINGTON PROPOSALS ARE SO DISTURBING.
IN THEM, THE US ACCEPTS A 25-YEAR PERIOD FOR THE NEW CANAL
TREATY BUT INSISTS ON AN ADDITIONAL FIFTY YEAR PERIOD FOR
THE DEFENSE OF THE WATERWAY, AFTER IT STILL WOULD HAVE THE
RIGHT TO DEFEND THE CANAL, FOR "AN INDEFINITE PERIOD OF TIME".
THIS IS EQUIVALENT TO PERPETUITY.

THERE IS ALSO ANOTHER FACTOR. THE NATIONAL STRUGGLE TO PUT
AN END TO THE COLONIAL ENCLAVE OF THE CANAL ZONE IS NOT
THE PASSING WISH OF GENERAL TORRIJOS AND HIS GOVERNMENT.
IT IS A RIPE DECISION, AN ACT OF NATIONAL CONSCIOUSNESS.
FROM NOW ON, NO PANAMANIAN LEADER CAN AFFORD TO IGNORE
THIS FACT.

A FRIENDLY PANAMA IS A POSITIVE ASSET TO US SECURITY, BUT
PANAMANIAN WOULD RATHER COOPERATE WITH THE US AS A FREE
COUNTRY THAN AS A CHAINED COLLABORATOR. THE PREPOSTEROUS
FEAR OF PANAMA BECOMING THE ALLY OF AN EXTRACONTINENTAL
POWER CAN ONLY BE THE PRODUCT OF A SIMPLE MIND, OR
A PRETEXT TO GAIN THE SUPPORT OF THE UNINFORMED. NO PANAMANIAN
WOULD LIKE TO BE UNDER ANY INFLUENCE THAT CAN JEOPARDIZE
THE SECURITY OF OUR HEMISPHERE.

FINALLY, IN REGARD TO THE ANTI-PANAMA LOBBY AND THE OTHER
ENEMIES OF A NEGOTIATED SOLUTION, INCLUDING GOVERNORS REAGAN
AND WALLACE, I WOULD LIKE TO QUOTE FROM THE OXFORD
SHAKESPEARE "APOCHRYFA": "...GREAT ACHILLES SPEARS COULD
HEAL THE WOUND IT MADE, THE MORAL IS WHAT MIGHTY
MEN MISDO, THEY CAN AMEND..."

ROQUE JAVIER LAURENZA
NEWYORK, NOV 13, 1975
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